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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Seventy-first session

Summary record of the 1647th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 2 November 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (CEDAW/C/LAO/8-9; CEDAW/C/LAO/Q/8-9 and CEDAW/C/LAO/Q/8-9/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), introducing the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (CEDAW/C/LAO/8-9), said that all the Committee's recommendations on the State party's previous report had been translated into Lao and disseminated to government officials, stakeholders and the general public. Through the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, ministries and other State bodies at the central and local levels had been tasked with the implementation of the recommendations relating to their respective roles and functions. Many of the recommendations had also been integrated into the previous and current five-year National Socioeconomic Development Plans and were being implemented through policies, laws, strategies and action programmes.

3. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women played a key role in the promotion of gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women. It had prepared the periodic report in coordination with the relevant government agencies and, in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), had organized consultation workshops with development partners, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations working in the field of women's rights.

4. The Lao People's Democratic Republic was a multi-ethnic nation and its Constitution and legislation encouraged solidarity, non-discrimination and equal treatment of all ethnic groups; any acts that undermined solidarity among ethnic groups were punishable by law. The rights of women, children and persons with disabilities were protected and promoted under the Constitution and under legislation such as the Law on the Development and Protection of Women, the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children and the Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons. Under the amended Law on the State Budget, all sectors were required to allocate a budget for gender equality. Women's interests were also safeguarded under the Law on Labour and the Law on Civil Servants, which provided for maternity and paternity leave.

5. With the aim of providing better services to women, the authorities continued to improve governance and public administration in order to ensure greater effectiveness, transparency, accountability and participation. Of particular note was the strengthening of the rule of law in line with the declaration on the rule of law at the national and international levels, which had been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012.

6. Two national studies on violence against women had been carried out: the second Lao Social Indicator Survey and a study aimed at estimating the resource requirements for a minimum package of essential services for women experiencing violence in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The findings of both studies had been incorporated into the national database and made available to the public.

7. Most of the Sustainable Development Goals and most of the Committee's recommendations had been integrated into the current National Socioeconomic Development Plan and were being progressively realized.

8. At the regional level, his country had contributed to the development of women's rights in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in terms of institution-building and standard-setting. It was a member of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children and had helped to draft the

ASEAN Human Rights Declaration and other declarations relevant to the promotion and protection of women's rights and interests.

Articles 1 to 6

9. **Ms. Song**, commending the State party on the numerous new legislative provisions it had adopted to combat discrimination against women, asked what measures were in place to ensure that they were effectively implemented and genuinely of benefit to women. She asked how many complaints had been filed under the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children, how many prosecutions had ensued and what penalties had been imposed under the relevant provisions of the Penal Code. Were complainants entitled to compensation? She would also like to know whether the definition set forth in the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children and the penalties established in the Penal Code also applied in the private sector.

10. Noting that, under the Law on the Handling of Petitions, there were three mechanisms of redress available to persons who deemed that their rights and freedoms had been violated by State officials, she asked what steps had been taken to encourage women to lodge complaints without fear and whether victims had access to the victim and witness assistance and protection programmes. She also wondered whether there were any plans to conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness of those mechanisms.

11. She asked the delegation to comment on reports that women living in rural areas and members of the numerous ethnic minorities had difficulty in obtaining and understanding information on laws, policies, programmes and projects. Much of the information on policy, for example, was not available online or in languages other than Lao. What measures were in place to improve women's access to such information, particularly women in rural areas and women members of ethnic minorities?

12. **Mr. Boupha** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that, once a law had been promulgated, the Government attached high priority to the dissemination of information to ensure that women understood their rights and obligations in relation to the law. Such information was disseminated through the Government's legislation website, via ministries, on television and other media, and in the Official Gazette. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children also played an important role at both the central and local levels in ensuring that the general public understood legislation concerning women.

13. The provincial people's assemblies constituted one of the mechanisms for ensuring access to justice at the local level. Each assembly had a women's caucus that monitored issues and complaints raised by women. The provincial assembly could provide remedies in accordance with the circumstances of the case.

14. With support from the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and NGOs, access to justice had been improved through the opening of legal aid offices in 11 of the country's 18 provinces. The offices provided legal information to those who found it difficult to obtain.

15. **Ms. Song** said that she would like to know whether the country's village mediation units were subject to regular inspections to ensure that women's rights were upheld and not compromised. Was training provided to members of the units in order to raise their gender sensitivity and equip them to handle disputes fairly?

16. Lastly, in view of the Committee's position that women were a driving force for sustainable development, she wished to commend the State party for the progress it had made in involving women in its efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

17. **Mr. Boupha** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the village mediation units were evaluated annually and, with support from various international donors, training was also conducted.

18. **Mr. Khammoungkhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that his Government had achieved nearly 60 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goal targets incorporated into the current National Socioeconomic Development Plan; the remainder

would be incorporated into the next two Plans. The Government took a gender-based approach to social development, particularly in relation to health and education. Recently it had held a national workshop at which the role of women in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals had been highlighted.

19. **Ms. Phonethip** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children had incorporated Sustainable Development Goal 5, along with the Committee's recommendations, into relevant policy and legislation, as well as into the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2016–2025, the third Five-Year National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2016–2020 and the National Action Plan on Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Children.

20. **Mr. Boupha** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that no statistics were yet available on complaints under the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children, as it had not entered into force until the previous day, 1 November 2018.

21. **Ms. Haidar** said that, notwithstanding the State party's efforts to improve gender equality, much remained to be done to achieve the de jure and de facto equality of women. She therefore wished to know what impact the 2016 merger of the National Commission for Mothers and Children and the National Commission for the Advancement of Women — to create the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children — had had on the effectiveness of the national machinery for the advancement of women. The fact that the Commission now addressed issues relating to women, mothers and children could perpetuate the stereotypical view that women were citizens only through their social role as mothers and that they had sole responsibility for raising children. She would like to know whether any steps were being taken to remedy that misconception, whether the new Commission had a clearly defined mandate and what human, financial and technical resources had been allocated to it for the fulfilment of its objectives.

22. She noted that the Lao Women's Union was responsible for promoting women's rights, on the one hand, and preserving cultural traditions, on the other. She wondered how the Union balanced that dual role and ensured that it did not allow social and cultural barriers to women's advancement to persist.

23. The Committee was concerned to note that in 2017 the Government had adopted a decree on associations that restricted freedom of association and limited civic space in the State party. She urged the Government to consider amending that decree to bring it into line with international human rights law, under which the freedoms of association and expression were fundamental rights. Lastly, she noted that, although the State party had a number of separate mechanisms working to promote human rights, it had not yet established an independent national human rights institution. She wondered whether the Government would consider doing so, since such an institution could serve as a link between the State and civil society and could provide the global perspective that was currently missing.

24. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia**, noting the information provided in paragraphs 32–38 of the State party's report, regarding the temporary special measures taken to integrate gender into all areas of decision-making, said that she wondered whether the meaning and scope of temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations Nos. 5 (1988) and 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, had been fully understood. Temporary special measures were aimed at accelerating de facto equality between women and men in all areas of life, not just in decision-making. She wished to know what temporary special measures had been taken to achieve gender equality in other areas of life, such as health, education and employment; to address intersectional forms of discrimination; and to combat rights violations, vertical and horizontal segregation and the systematic exclusion of women and girls. She asked why the targets for women's representation in decision-making were so low, at just 20 per cent, and what time frame had been set, and incentives put in place, for the achievement of those targets. It would also be useful to know what indicators had been set to benchmark performance and progress towards gender targets in the country's seventh and eighth five-

year National Socioeconomic Development Plans, whether any of the targets had been met and, if not, what additional measures were being taken for their achievement.

25. The State party had acknowledged that, in some ethnic groups, landownership and inheritance rights tended to favour men, but it had decided to allow those cultural practices to continue until the ethnic groups themselves were ready to change them. She pointed out that the State party had an obligation to ensure the full implementation of the Convention, including through the use of temporary special measures to dismantle barriers to de facto equality between women and men. That obligation could not, and should not, be left to the discretion of particular groups.

26. **Ms. Prathoumvanh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the decision to merge the National Commission for Mothers and Children with the National Commission for the Advancement of Women had been motivated by a desire to strengthen the national machinery for the advancement of women and ensure a more streamlined and coordinated approach to intersecting issues relating to women, mothers and children. Regarding State budget allocations, each line ministry was required to develop a sector-specific workplan on gender issues and, thus, to incorporate the advancement of women into its budget.

27. **Ms. Kittavong** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that she wished to emphasize that the various national bodies established in the Lao People's Democratic Republic to promote and protect human rights — such as the National Steering Committee on Human Rights, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children and the National Committee on Anti-Human Trafficking — were able to perform their functions in an independent manner. For that reason, the Government considered that the establishment of a national human rights institution was not necessary at the current time.

28. **Ms. Phonethip** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), replying to the question on measures taken to achieve the 20-per-cent target for women's representation in decision-making, said that in January 2018 the Government had issued a resolution establishing the criteria for the selection of senior officials at all levels of administration. The Government was currently drafting instructions to aid in the implementation of that resolution and to achieve the participation of women of all ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, the Lao Women's Union disseminated information on that resolution and actively encouraged women to take steps towards increasing their representation.

29. **Ms. Haidar** said that, while she appreciated the information on the reasons for merging the two National Commissions, the question she had asked was whether doing so had yielded any specific improvements in the functioning of the national machinery for the advancement of women. She also wished to know what percentage of the State budget was allocated for gender equality and whether the Government had considered adopting the gender-responsive budgeting approach. She would also welcome a reply to her question as to whether the Government planned to amend the decree on associations in order to bring it into line with international human rights law.

30. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she would be grateful for a reply to her question regarding the implementation of temporary special measures in areas other than decision-making. She would welcome more information about the 2014–2025 women's advancement strategy of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport. In particular, she wondered what budget had been allocated for its implementation and whether the objective was simply to increase women's participation or to involve women fully as important stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector. Lastly, since the report contained very few statistics, it would be helpful to know how the State party monitored and evaluated the implementation of its gender policies, strategies and action plans.

31. **Mr. Khammoungkhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that there were no measures limiting civil society's involvement in the country's socioeconomic development. Indeed, the aim of Decree No. 238, on associations, was to facilitate the work of civil society. In order to carry out their activities, civil society organizations were required to work with government partners in the relevant sectors and to have the necessary documentation for registration with the Ministry of Home Affairs. Clear guidelines had been issued to help make it easier for civil society organizations to comply with the Decree.

including with regard to the receipt of funds from foreign donors and development partners. Lastly, the Constitution expressly provided for citizens' right to exercise freedom of expression, to set up associations and to stage demonstrations that were not contrary to the laws of the land.

32. **Ms. Phonethip** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Law on the State Budget provided that all budgetary expenditure must ensure gender equality. As a result, all ministries were required to incorporate the gender perspective into their budgets and to earmark funding specifically for gender-related activities. Workshops were being held for officials working at the central and provincial levels to improve their understanding of gender budgeting.

33. The Government had developed sector-specific indicators in order to monitor and evaluate the implementation of its national action plans and other measures, including temporary special measures. In that connection, the 20-per-cent target for women's representation applied to all sectors; thus, each ministry was responsible for implementing its own action plan to achieve that goal.

34. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia**, noting that she had not heard from the delegation regarding the State party's obligation to remove traditional cultural barriers to women's equality, said that she urged the Government to take steps to eliminate traditional practices that discriminated against women. On another note, she would like to know how the sectors identified as gender priorities under the current National Socioeconomic Development Plan had been selected and whether women's representative organizations or other groups had been consulted as part of the process.

35. **Ms. Chantharanonh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), referring to the question on ethnic minority women's right to own land, said that spouses had equal rights to the marital home. By law, the names of both husband and wife were to be registered on title deeds. In that connection, a number of organizations worked with ethnic groups to inform them of the legislation in force and promote gender equality. It took time to modify traditional practices; however, steps were being taken to bring about cultural changes, in particular through the sharing of information.

36. The process for determining sector-specific gender priorities included consultations and discussions, which took place from the grass-roots level upward. That bottom-up approach had highlighted issues such as the need to ensure that rural women and poor families had direct access to water and sanitation, an objective that was incorporated into the 2014–2025 women's advancement strategy of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport.

37. **Ms. Rana** said that the results of the 2014 national survey on women's health and life experiences, which had found that patriarchal attitudes were deeply embedded among both men and women in Lao society, highlighted the need for more rigorous long-term investment to change societal attitudes and raise public awareness of the root causes of gender-based discrimination. She would like to know whether the State party would consider developing and adopting a comprehensive national strategy to eliminate gender discrimination, stereotypes and harmful practices. She would be interested to hear whether studies had been conducted to detect any gender stereotypes in school textbooks and curricula, and whether teachers had received training in that regard. What programmes were in place to engage men and boys in tackling the issue?

38. Noting that the Government relied on influential leaders of the different ethnic groups to maintain harmony in society, she wondered how many such leaders were women. It would be helpful to know what targeted programmes had been developed to encourage such leaders to exert a positive and gender-sensitive influence on their communities. A large number of media campaigns had been launched to raise awareness of the Convention; it would be useful to have information as to how such campaigns were designed, whether civil society provided input and what percentage of media professionals were women. Did the campaigns address the stigmatization of victims of violence? She invited the delegation to submit evidence of the impact of those campaigns.

39. She was heartened to note that the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children recognized marital rape as a crime and established appropriate penalties. She would appreciate examples of court cases in which that law had been applied and would be interested to learn whether its definition of rape covered non-consensual sexual relations of any type. She remained concerned, however, that the law distinguished between minor and major incidents of violence and provided for alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, including family mediation through village mediation units, which were mainly composed of men. The failure to impose penalties for minor offences had the effect of legitimizing violence. She wished to know whether the State party would consider removing the distinction between minor and serious offences to bring the law into line with the Convention. She asked how the Government planned to provide clearer and more effective protection in civil and criminal proceedings for women and children who were victims of violence and whether it would consider establishing a detailed protocol on the enforcement of the law's provisions by the courts and the police.

40. **Ms. Jahan** said that both cross-border and domestic trafficking in women and girls continued to be a significant problem. Domestic trafficking from rural areas was on the rise, and there were reports that victims of forced and fraudulent marriages abroad were often subsequently forced into prostitution. Expressing concern about the lack of a formal mechanism to monitor trafficking and exploitation of prostitution, she asked what measures, such as increased budgetary and human resources or increased NGO participation, were envisaged to reinvigorate interministerial coordination in the implementation of the national action plan for combating human trafficking. It would also be helpful to know whether the national action plan adequately incorporated a gender perspective that focused on the special needs of women victims, and whether systematic campaigns were carried out to raise the awareness of women and children in rural and poverty-stricken areas about the risks of human trafficking and illegal and unsafe migration. She wondered whether law enforcement personnel and judicial officials received systematic training and capacity-building, with a focus on gender-sensitive procedures, to ensure effective identification and referral of victims and the appropriate investigation and prosecution of cases. In the light of reports on the prevalence of corruption and complicity by officials in human trafficking, she would welcome examples of any disciplinary measures imposed on such officials under article 87 of the anti-trafficking law.

41. It was reported that the State party had become a popular destination for international surrogacy arrangements, especially since neighbouring countries such as Cambodia and Thailand had taken restrictive measures while the Lao People's Democratic Republic had not. She wished to hear what legal measures, based on the best practices of other countries in the region, would be taken in order to regulate surrogacy and guard against the sale of children and the exploitation of women.

42. Noting that there was substantial evidence of organized prostitution in the State party and that it might involve trafficked women and girls, she asked what effective legal safeguards were in place to ensure that women in prostitution were not criminalized, given that commercial sex work was a criminal offence. Information on the stringent measures adopted by local authorities and municipalities to regulate the activities of adult entertainment outlets through regular monitoring and inspections would be useful. She would also appreciate information on the efforts undertaken to discourage the demand for prostitution, as recommended by the Committee in its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/7, para. 30). Lastly, she invited the delegation to give details on the measures envisaged and/or in place to support women and girls who wished to leave prostitution.

43. **Ms. Phonethip** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children had been drafted on the basis of the findings of the 2014 survey. Advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns were conducted to prevent violence against women and girls. For example, events had been organized every year since 2011 to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

44. The issue of violence was covered by school textbooks to raise awareness among children from a young age, and the Ministry of Education and Sports trained teachers

nationwide on the subject of violence against women. The Lao Women's Union regularly broadcast radio programmes in Lao and in minority languages to address gender-based violence in rural communities. Budget constraints meant that the Government had to focus on priority activities in that area. After the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children had been adopted, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women had worked with female parliamentarians to disseminate information on the law by organizing workshops and seminars with members of the Women's Union, community leaders and other stakeholders.

45. **Mr. Boupha** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that offences under the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children and the anti-trafficking law had been incorporated into the Penal Code. Perpetrators of such offences were brought to justice, whether they lived in rural communities or elsewhere; between 2010 and 2013, for example, there had been over 700 prosecutions for violence against women. The sale of children, fraudulent marriages and surrogacy for the purpose of human trafficking were considered offences under both the anti-trafficking law and the Penal Code and were punished accordingly.

46. **Ms. Chantharanonh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Government's efforts to combat violence against women had consisted of three stages. First, the survey on violence had been conducted; then the action plan had been developed; and finally the law on combating violence against women had been drafted. According to the indicators used to monitor the implementation of the law and the action plan, the number of violence cases had decreased owing to greater public awareness of what constituted rape and gender-based violence. The Government worked to raise the awareness of ethnic minority communities across the country with respect to the issue of violence against women. At the local level, village committees had been set up and projects had been developed by non-profit associations offering legal advice. In schools, both students and teachers received education and training on issues related to violence against women and children. Not all cases of domestic violence were brought before the village mediation units. Advisory teams existed at the village level to inform victims of their options vis-à-vis legal action or mediation. It was for the person concerned to decide whether to resort to mediation or to legal proceedings.

47. The National Committee on Anti-Human Trafficking worked with the police and the Lao Women's Union to conduct monthly inspections of premises where trafficking victims were commonly found, such as bars and hotels. When cases of human trafficking were discovered on such premises, the owner faced penalties and the premises could be shut down. Inspections to tackle forced labour were also carried out by a labour inspection committee, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and trade unions. When complaints of forced labour were filed, those bodies also gave advice on how the complainants could avail themselves of the justice system. The Lao People's Democratic Republic cooperated with neighbouring countries and ASEAN in preventing violence against women. The country had adopted regional and national programmes in that connection, including the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

48. **Ms. Rana** said she was aware that mediation was not mandatory, but many cases were still brought before village mediation units. She would appreciate information as to the composition of those units. Were they required to provide for the proportional representation of women?

49. In view of the lack of disaggregated data on violence against women, she wondered whether the State party planned to establish a system for the regular collection of data disaggregated by type of violence, ethnic group and the circumstances in which instances of violence took place. Given that the State party had indicated that budget constraints prevented it from carrying out consistent, broad dissemination and training on the law on violence against women, she wondered whether the Government intended to ensure sufficient funding in the future by reviewing its budget allocations. Lastly, she asked whether there were separate shelters for victims of violence and survivors of human trafficking.

50. **Ms. Jahan** said that she would be interested to hear whether the Government planned to set up dedicated shelters for victims of human trafficking that would provide long-term support. She would like to know how NGOs and civil society organizations were involved in the work of the anti-trafficking committees at the local level.

51. **Ms. Chantharanonh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that village mediation units consisted of teachers, health-care workers and village administrators, including women. They were given three-month training courses on the law and on victim support.

52. As the conduct of separate surveys on violence against women was very expensive, the Government had selected key indicators from existing data sources in order to monitor that phenomenon, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), UN-Women and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). As a result of those efforts, the country should be able to provide more data in its next periodic report.

53. There were four shelters in the nation's capital, Vientiane, and in nearby provinces with a high incidence of human trafficking. Each shelter provided specific services geared towards the needs of the victims. For example, some offered intensive medical and psychological care for persons who had suffered trauma, and others provided education and training to reintegrate trafficking victims into society. However, the shelters accommodated both domestic violence victims and human trafficking victims.

54. **Mr. Boupha** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that village mediation units only dealt with minor offences. The units' staff were adequately trained and their decisions were based on the law, not on traditional or cultural norms. Serious criminal cases were always referred to the criminal justice system. Lastly, article 215 of the new Penal Code criminalized surrogacy for the purposes of human trafficking.

55. **Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Government would discuss the Committee's comments in respect of surrogacy for the purpose of trafficking and would review article 215 of the Penal Code in light of those comments.

Articles 7 to 9

56. **Ms. Song** said that she would like to know the reasons for the low representation of women in leadership positions at the local level and what measures, including temporary special measures, the Government would take to achieve the National Socioeconomic Development Plan targets for women's participation in political life and in leadership positions. She would like to know whether training or capacity-building was provided to women who wished to hold public office or senior management posts, and how many women had been appointed as judges. Had the State party set targets for women's representation on the executive boards of enterprises, especially large enterprises? What measures were in place to increase the number of women in the diplomatic service and in senior diplomatic posts?

57. **Ms. Prathoumvanh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that poverty, cultural traditions and insufficient levels of education prevented women in rural areas from reaching leadership positions at the local level. The Government was seeking to promote education and to raise awareness of gender equality in rural areas. There was a rule that every election to fill vacancies in village-level public authorities must include at least one woman candidate, and the election process was weighted in favour of women candidates. Training was available for women who held or aspired to hold leadership positions. There were considerably fewer female than male judges, but female law students currently outnumbered their male counterparts, meaning that the balance of female to male judges would later shift in favour of women. Women occupied management positions in 70 to 80 per cent of small businesses, but were less likely to occupy such positions in medium and large enterprises. The Government was promoting small and medium-sized enterprises and had made business loans available to women on favourable terms. In the diplomatic service, it was now obligatory for a woman to be included in every delegation. The number of women ambassadors had increased, as had the number of women members of diplomatic missions in general.

58. **Ms. Song** asked whether political parties had a quota system in place to encourage participation by women.

59. **Ms. Prathoumvanh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that there was a quota system in the National Assembly and in political parties, but capacity-building for women was required before those quotas could be implemented fully, to ensure that women did not obtain posts simply on the basis of the quota.

60. **Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that each State body and each political party had its own specific targets.

61. **Ms. Gabr** said that article 23 of the Law on Nationality contained wording to the effect that children who were over 15 but less than 18 years of age and married in accordance with the laws could, if their parents were of different nationalities, choose to adopt the nationality of either parent. That provision was inconsistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which the Lao People's Democratic Republic was a party, as it implied that a person under 18 years of age could be legally married. She would welcome clarification of that issue.

62. In the State party, especially in rural areas where levels of illiteracy were higher, it was often the case that births were registered only in personal records and not in public records. That was not equivalent to the issuance of a birth certificate. She would like to know whether the State party was conducting awareness-raising campaigns or taking other measures in rural areas to address that problem, and would appreciate information on the role of the village chiefs in birth registration and on the steps taken to encourage birth registration among ethnic minority groups.

63. **Ms. Chantharanonh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that in rural areas, births were reported to the village chief, who passed the information on to the district registry office. Persons living in rural or ethnic minority communities did not always collect their children's birth certificates from the district office, but the births had nonetheless been registered.

64. **Ms. Gabr**, noting that the Lao People's Democratic Republic had the highest rate of early marriage of all the ASEAN countries, said that awareness-raising campaigns should be launched to alert young mothers, especially those in rural and ethnic minority communities, to the importance of birth registration. She asked once more whether article 23 of the Law on Nationality implied that children under the age of 18 years could legally marry in the State party.

65. **Mr. Boupha** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Penal Code prohibited the marriage of persons under 18 years of age, and provided for sanctions for that offence.

Articles 10 to 14

66. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she would like to know whether the National Action Plan on Education for All 2003–2015 had been evaluated and, if so, what the findings had been. Order and Recommendation No. 1293/MES of 2012 provided for free and compulsory primary education in the State party. Yet in practice, parents were obliged to pay secondary costs, with roughly half of all schools imposing such costs. She asked how the Order was being enforced and whether penalties were imposed in respect of violations. Expenditure on education had increased, but the non-salary operating budget was still too low. She would like to know what steps the Government was taking to address that question.

67. The State party had provided information showing that girls' enrolment rates had increased, but the Committee would also appreciate information on retention, progression and attrition rates. Had the goal of gender equality in primary education by 2015 been achieved? She would like to know when specific data would be available on the dropout rate for girls, and especially on cases where pregnancy was involved. Traditional attitudes meant that girls were frequently required to perform domestic tasks in the home. She wondered whether the education system had considered enabling girls to complete their homework by keeping them at school or taking other measures to allow them to concentrate

on their education, such as reaching out to parents to encourage them to give equal weight to the education of both sons and daughters.

68. She asked whether the State party had implemented the Committee's previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/7) in respect of multilingual education and the possibility of sending university student volunteers to rural ethnic minority villages to teach Lao and, if so, what the impact had been; she would also appreciate information on literacy and enrolment rates among ethnic minorities. The State party had reported that funding had been made available to enable members of ethnic minorities to earn qualifications as primary school teachers. She would like to know the impact of that measure and whether those students' instruction included the multigrade methodology or other teaching or learning approaches tailored to their circumstances.

69. She asked how many schools had been built in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, how many girls had enrolled and what their retention rates had been. She would like to know how many schools failed to provide the five statutory primary school grades and what measures were being taken to ensure that they did so. Was the State party considering the use of temporary special measures to ensure that women attained their educational goals and were encouraged to take up fields of study that were traditionally dominated by men? She asked why only 25 per cent of the Asian Development Bank vocational education subsidies had been reserved for women, instead of 50 per cent, especially in areas where women were underrepresented. Temporary special measures could prove useful in that connection. She would like to know whether adult education programmes were in place to address the problem of low literacy among women. Currently, children completed primary school at the age of 12 but could not take up paid employment until the age of 15. Would the Government take steps to synchronize the end of schooling with the age of employment?

70. **Mr. Bergby** asked whether the State party could provide a time frame for its intended accession to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The Lao People's Democratic Republic had ratified eight International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions, but he would like to know whether a road map was in place for the ratification of other important ILO Conventions, including the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).

71. He would like to receive information on the pay gap between men and women in the State party and on whether a study had been conducted to determine its root causes. In 2015, the minimum wage had been increased by 44 per cent. He would like to know whether the labour inspectorate, when checking to see whether enterprises were respecting the minimum wage, also checked to see whether women were being paid at the same rate as men. How did inspectors ensure that women belonging to vulnerable groups were not paid less than the minimum wage?

72. He wished to know the meaning of the indication, in the State party's replies to the Committee's list of issues (CEDAW/C/LAO/Q/8-9/Add.1), that women had the right to work in every manufacturing and service business that did not "conflict with the laws". He would also like to know which jobs women were not allowed to perform on the grounds that the work might harm their reproductive health. What had been the outcome of the programme to improve working conditions in the garment industry, which had been run in 12 factories? Could the results be applied to other factories, and could the programme be extended throughout the entire sector?

73. He would be grateful for statistics in respect of sexual harassment in the public and private sectors. He asked what measures had been taken to address sexual harassment and raise victims' awareness of the remedies available, and what penalties were applicable to perpetrators. The law appeared to refer only to sexual harassment by employers; he would be interested to know what measures applied when the harassment came from a co-worker.

74. Of the 105 days' paid maternity leave provided for in both the public and private sectors, at least 42 days must be taken after the woman gave birth. He asked whether that figure should be increased and whether the Government planned to assist the private sector

in paying for maternity leave. He would like to know the length of paternity leave, whether it was paid and whether it was mandatory in the State party. The retirement age for women was 55, while for men it was 60. The lower age for women might affect their ability to reach higher-ranking positions. He asked whether the State party might consider amending that rule and whether women could, if they so wished, continue working beyond the age of 55.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.